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THE SEARCH FOR BETTY PAGE

A recent issue of the Valley Edition of the L. A. Weekly featured a long article on the history of Betty Page and her revival as a cult figure in the weird world of comic fandom. People are still trying to find Betty, who would be 68 years old this year, and while I understand why I can't really say I am sympathetic to this quest. What if she were found and agreed to subject herself to the current celebrity marketplace? Can you see Betty as Dave Stevens drew her in the early **ROCKETEER** stories juxtaposed with her current image on the cover of some fanzine? Fact is, Betty did the smart thing when she left New York and disappeared into Florida in the mid-fifties. She knew that a model's career was a short one and she found a life. What's to find?

You know celebrities are human junk food. They are processed and served to an indiscriminate public as easily as soft drinks and they have as little meaning or staying power. Television has made their images so common to everyone that they are taken for granted along with the behavior that is appropriate. What happens when a mallie spots a celeb? An announcement and a request for an autograph and general embarrassment. Truth is, if Betty Page were seen wandering around at a comic convention, most people would assume she was there with her great grandchildren and she'd probably be run over by a stampede of clods trying to get Dave Stevens' autograph on some old Pacific Comic books.

What would Betty say to the fans? For all her charm as a figure model for mags like **TITTER** and **WINK**, she was never on the creative end. She was always an object. Irving Klaw never cared anything about her mind and it's doubtful that any of

the other photographers did either. It was the image of a young Betty that inspired Dave Stevens and other artists. They never knew she had a teaching credential and other aspirations than posing in bathing suits and leather underwear.

Back in 1971 I heard about a show of oldtime vaudeville people that was touring and when I found it was going to play the Orpheum on Market Street in San Francisco I called the agent and arranged to spend some time hanging around the dressing rooms talking to people like Jackie Coogan [the Kid in the Chaplin movie] and Cass Daley and Sally Rand. I was particularly excited about seeing Sally Rand who I remembered from my father's description of her fan dance at the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago. I had seen one picture of her with a giant feather and for me Sally was sex with a capital S. The woman I met that evening in a dilapidated dressing room in the bowels of the Orpheum was 68 years old. She was sick, pretty tired from the strain of dealing with the show, and not even vaguely related to the glossy photograph her agent had given me. At the same time, she was friendly and we had a chat about her life. She had gone back to college and educated herself to become a speech therapist and she was excited about helping children with speech difficulties to make it through the school system. She didn't care any more about the past than most of the older people I have met during my writing career. She said the dancing was a part of her youth. Like many, she had come under the influence of Isadora Duncan and developed the fan and bubble dances. What more was there to say about it? Later that evening she did the original fan dance onstage and the friendly rose lights made her look quite sexy, but I'm sure it was an ordeal she was glad to leave behind at the end of the evening.

So I vote we enjoy the photographs and the art Betty Page has inspired and leave the woman she has become alone. It just might be that her present self hates what her younger self permitted. In 1932, Alice Pleasance Little was awarded an honorary doctorate from Columbia University and she was talked into making the trip from England to accept the award

because she needed the money offered her for the original copy of Lewis Carroll's **ALICE'S ADVENTURES UNDERGROUND**. Alice Little was not being honored for any personal achievement, but for being the child who inspired Carroll [Charles Ludwig Dodgson] to tell and then write down **ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND**. I'm sure this elderly woman resented and more than likely hated having spent her life associated with a fictional character in a children's book and I suspect Betty Page would find it even less of a reward to be found and presented as a guest at a comic convention. There still isn't anything particularly honorable about posing for bondage or pin-up photographs, however much they appeal to the kinkier among us, and I suspect a religious woman like the current Ms. Page would be upset, outraged, embarrassed, and hardly pleased with the adoration currently directed at her previous sinful self.

Well, I suspect God has forgiven Betty, but I know the fans never will.
C.G.

David Miller has two pages in **WAVEMAKER**, a Canadian comic with a nice cover by Allen Freeman. \$4 pp from Mark Innes, Jackson Sta, POB 57582, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8P 4X3.

BUZZ 3 has some strange stuff therein as you can see by the panels displayed. Check it out at your local dealer. \$2.95. "The Adventures of Fetal Elvis" is a real trip through inner space.

CHRONIC IDIOCY is better art than story, but I think you'll enjoy looking at it. It's from Caliber Press, 621-B So. Main St., Plymouth, MI 48170. \$3.25 pp.

Tundra is publishing the last complete work by Vaughn Bodé, **POEM TOONS**. Next January, they will begin serializing the completed **COBALT 60**. Mark Bodé and Larry Todd finished the work.

Don't miss Scott Finley and Brooks Hagan's **BLOOD JUNKIES ON CAPITAL HILL**. If you didn't know the vampires have taken over Washington, you will after you read this comic book. I found it at Comic Relief in Berkeley.

Cerebus 151 begins a new story, mothers & daughters. At your local dealer.

El Vibora 141 is \$10 pp from J. M. Berenguer, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain. Reprints one of Crumb's grossest Mr. Natural stories in Spanish.

FROM GRIOT TO RAP

Let's lay off the teenagers!

It's important to note what happened in the early 1970s that inspired the latest manifestation of the African oral tradition. Young black and Latino youth in New York City found themselves disenfranchised from black radio. Until then, young black males listened to radio more than any other ethnic group. Black radio, through its D.J.s, served the role of cultural griot. However, in the early '70s, an emphasis was placed on attracting an older and more affluent demographic audience. Translation: a white audience. Young people were left without an important medium that reflected their tastes, and in this country many people get a sense of worth via the media. At the same time, New York's flourishing gang culture was being quelled in a major move to eliminate such notorious entities. Gangs are often formed because youth are seeking reaffirmation. So you had two major facets of youth culture being X's out and a void was created. When people find themselves in a situation where they're being made expendable, They will create a separate reality. They did and it's called hip-hop. The same thing happened with punk, go-go, and house.) Keep in mind that hip-hop was the culture from which rap (plus breakdancing and graffiti art) emerged.

David Cook. BAM, 9-6-91

I'm a little bugged with all this tv gang promo. Quite simply, it's a lot of negative horseshit designed to alienate parents and children and keep the bucks flowing into the corporate coffer. Every day I see teenage gangs this and that and always accompanied with a lot of rap about violence and crime and drugs. Gimme a fucking break here. These are government sponsored ghetto control drugs and the kids who get caught up in this scam are the victims not the villains. Let's look at it all from a different perspective for a minute.

A group of teenagers in uniforms on the athletic field is a team, right? Yet, the same group of teenagers in Raiders jackets downing a slurpee at the local 7-11 suddenly becomes a dangerous teenage gang. A group of teenaged women jumping up and down in skimpy leotards and skirts as they cheer mindlessly on the sidelines of a gym floor is a squad of cheerleaders, but the same group of women in imitation leather jackets and easter egg dyed hairdoes smoozing in front of a local punk club miraculously becomes a teenage gang. How come a group of albies getting shitfaced at their local bar isn't considered a dangerous gang of reckless drivers? Why don't we ever read stories about the gangs of violent frustrated housewives stoned on valium or librium who hang around the malls and the laundromats?

Grown-ups seldom ask the right questions when they try to understand teenage behavior. Teens gather in groups for the same reasons as adults, for friendship, protection, and the other satisfactions of social intercourse. The difference is that teen behavior is visible, out there, while adult behavior often isn't. The average drug addict in this country is not a Saturday night crack smoker in the ghetto in spite of what your tv tells you. The major addict is a middle aged white professional who does his drugs in his home or in his Mercedes. Teenagers do not have their own space, so they go to the malls and the drive-ins or hang out on a favorite street corner. If they go to their parents' homes, they are not free to be themselves. They have to conform to parental rules. The teens then who want to assert themselves and try making some of their own decisions have no choice but to hang out somewhere outside their parents' domain. As you go down the social ladder you find more people outside than in because there is simply no room for them inside. If you have ever seen a one or two bedroom apartment you know full well that it gets smaller and smaller as the kids grow up. Four kids might live there, but four teenagers? Not without trying to kill one another for a little privacy.

It might surprise you to know that teenagers don't hate their parents. They hate control. The weaker give in, but the stronger fight back and, in our society, to fight back is to get into crime and go to prison. American prisons are filled with teenagers from the lower echelon who fought back and got punished for it. Since there are few ways for teens to fight back, they get satisfaction in small ways. Mom buys the clothes and dictates this and that, so a teen woman fights back through fashion. She buys and wears costumes her mother hates. The entire Madonna syndrome of the eighties and early nineties can be explained this way. Suburban mothers saw Madonna's black teddies and see through blouses as tarty and tasteless. She was dressing like a tramp and teaching their daughters to dress the same way. In a second, she was totally cool and ten year old kids were parading around the mall in skintight clothing and garish make-up. Mothers who resisted the image were tortured with pouting and anorexia. The smarter moms simply accepted it all and let the phase pass. I'm sure many of the young women who could not get satisfaction out of Madonna drag turned to Easter egg punk or shaved their heads and wore mutilation jewelry. Teen is always hormonally extreme and on any campus in 1991 you see the ultra-conformists rah-rahing the team in their neatly pressed little uniforms while the sneering punkettes light up cigarettes and adjust their noserings a few steps away. Between the extremes are all the others, the median mass that is never here nor there in this world. They seldom give their parents a lot of trouble, but they don't give them much joy either.

Corporate America doesn't care either way as long as everyone buys the products. Beer and cigarette commercials are a serious social danger, but these are so much a part of the corporate power structure that little can be done about them. Alcohol and nicotine kill more people each year than any of the falsely labeled hard drugs like cocaine and heroin.

Tv commercials teach the young that people are so much meat to be bought and sold on the market. Success is presented in terms of money and power and we see fewer and fewer examples of young people rewarded for being loyal friends, honest in their day to day lives, and basically humanitarian in their relationships with the other members of their community. People are judged by what they have, not how they came to have it, and any student of American history knows full well that the major fortunes in this country were obtained by theft and murder.

In contemporary America the child and the teenager, the young adult, the Junior Miss, and all of the other sales categories are simply marketing hustles designed to separate people from their money and keep them deeply in debt. Business has a vested interest in creating and nurturing teenage rebellion and we should realize that there is big money to be made through the exploitation of puberty, that our children will continue to be turned against us as long as we accept this exploitation as natural.

It is not.

The teen rebel, the alienated gang member, is a media creation just as the loyal family member was in the days of radio and earlier tv. This image is maintained and justified in the board rooms because it sells, but it destroys the structure of the family at the same time. Insidious, isn't it? In a unified family, everyone might watch tv together, but divide the family and you can sell several tv sets and have everyone watching different programs in different rooms.

I can't stress enough here how insidiously people have been conditioned to

accept the carefully packaged images promoted second by second on network television, images which are not real and do not function to maintain community solidarity. Television is selling you an image of fear and deliberately alienating you from your children. How often do you see TEEN GANG DRUGS VIOLENCE reiterated as an associational construct? Hundreds of times a week? Thousands? When was the last time you read about an ADULT GANG ON VALIUM trashing a shopping center? I get really tired of this bullshit, folks. 15,000 teens can go to a rap concert and two or three guys get into a fight and one gets shot and 15,995 people are collectively guilty by association. Bullshit. Write about the fights in the parking lot at Candlestick during a 49ers game. There are always fights on and off the field during certain games and they are never news. Why not? Why does the media want you to be afraid of and for your children? Is it because this distracts you from paying attention to the real social problems in this country, to the Savings and Loan rip-off, to the expansionist plans of the government in third world countries? To the millions of people who are unemployed and homeless?

In every urban center in America a few young people have turned to dealing crack cocaine for their livelihood. These young people do not import the coke from Peru and Bolivia and Colombia. They are the victims, not the villains. These drugs are no more or less dangerous than any other drugs. A middle-class woman stoned on valium is just as likely to run over someone in a crosswalk as is a kid on crack, even more so since the crack high only lasts half an hour or less and the valium lasts for a few hours. Alcohol kills more teenagers each year than any other drug. Go to your local library and look at the statistics for yourself. Older adults on combinations of alcohol and medication are a deadly threat to all of us and they never make the front page!

--Clay Geerdes 11/10/91

For the truth about the drug business in this country, see Brian Freemantle's **THE FIX**, in which he says the entire economy of Florida is now dependent upon the South American drug trade. Michael Levine, an ex-DEA agent proclaims the entire war on drugs a complete lie in **DEEP COVER**.

OZOPHILES' CORNER

Brave New Words **OZ SQUAD 1** is a lot better than I had expected it to be. It is true to the Baum stories in a way the films have never been and whether this is good, bad, or indifferent will depend upon your tastes. The first chapter deals with Tik-Tok and bears similarities to John Sladek's **TIK TOK** [1983]. Both show what would happen if the mechanical robot were to lose his morality factor. This factor goes back to Asimov's law for robots back in **I, ROBOT** which states in essence that robots are prohibited from performing any action which would lead to the harm of their makers. I won't summarize this story anymore than I do any other comic, but I want to say that the research is right on so Oz purists will enjoy the story. Dorothy has been modernized and restyled, but the artwork is very well done and will not offend fans of Denslow or Neill. If you can't find this locally, write to the company at POB 20421, Providence, RI 02920. \$3.25 should cover a copy. There is another Shanower Oz book due, but there is no word from First about who will wind up doing it.

KITCHEN SINK has a set of Robert Crumb trading cards available.



Eros has published **THE COLLECTED PURPLE PICTOGRAPHY** which shows how well Berni Wrightson drew in contrast to Vaughn Bodé. The **PICTOGRAPHY** pages ran in **SWANK** back in the early seventies. \$3.50.